HE'S ABSOLUTELY SMITTEN
he'll never let you go

He's Absolutely Smitten, He'll Never Let You Go by Brown Eyes Parker

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Summary: "I promise to be your best friend and to love you. . . for as long as you'll let me," Mike says, he wants to ask her if she'll let him love her forever. But the words die on his tongue because forever still seems so big at their age. So, he leans in to kiss her instead. Or All the times Mike gives El a promise ring as a place holder for the real thing.

He's Absolutely Smitten, He'll Never Let You Go

"***I vow to fiercely love you in all your forms, now and forever.***
I promise to never forget that this is a once in a lifetime love."

The Vow

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"I have something else for you," Mike tells El on Christmas morning

"More presents?" El looks shocked. "Mike, it's too much. I don't have anything else for you!"

"Don't worry about it," Mike says as he takes something from the pocket of his jeans. "It's not much at all, really."

Which wasn't really true, he'd spent an afternoon at the grocery store, feeding a gumball machine quarters until he finally got the ring he thought she would like the most. But she didn't need to know that.

El wraps her arms around her waist, waiting for him patiently. "What is it?" she finally asks.

Mike swallows, suddenly feeling bashful as he opened the plastic container and tossed it aside. "It's kind of silly," he tells her, gripping the cheap jewelry in his hand.

"You're not silly!" El assures him as she grabs his wrist and pries his fingers open. "Oh, Mike!"

In the white lights and tinsel, Mike can really see how unattractive the metal and enamel daisy is. "I know, I know. . ."

"It's pretty! I love it!"

Mike's eyes widened. "You do?"

El nods and holds out her hand for him. "Would you please put it on for me?"

Mike laughs as he slips it on her right ring finger. "I had a speech all planned out. . ."

"Go on," El says. "I want to hear what you have to say."

Mike grabs a breath and looks at her as he tightens the band because it's a little bit big and he doesn't want it to fall off. "El," he pauses, suddenly feeling a little ridiculous for even thinking about telling her that this ring is a placeholder for someday. "El, this is a promise ring. . . I'm promising to be your best friend and to love you for as long as you'll allow me to." he sighs. "I'm not trying to be possessive or anything. You can take it off whenever you'd like. You won't have to wear it at all if you don't want to."

El studies it and then looks at Mike again. "I want to promise to love you and to be your best friend for as long you'll let me. . . but I don't have a ring for you."

Mike holds her hand up to his mouth and brushes his lips against her knuckles. "As long as you wear this, it's like a promise to me."

"I promise Mike. I promise!" El tells him.

She doesn't take it off even at the end of the day when she starts growing a light, thin line of green. She still wears it when it starts to tarnish and the paint begins to chip off the daisy. 7 months later, at Karen's insistence, Mike trades it in for a pink plastic ring procured from one of Holly's princess dress-up boxes.

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When she turns sweet 16, Mike replaces the snug, cheap plastic ring with a thin gold band and a moonstone. He had gone looking for something a little more expensive than make believe and gumball machine jewelry.

He finally found it at a pawn shop and willingly handed over a portion of the money he had earned on his paper route and mowing lawns to the bored cashier.

He rehearses what he's going to say and swears he won't chicken out this time. But he knows he won't say it in front of everybody. Mostly

because the guys would (still) make fun of him and Max would (still) remind El that she was free to make her own decisions and she didn't need to promise Mike anything.

Mike would preface it with that without any interference from their friends.

The birthday party seems to drag on forever. Everyone is having too much fun to leave and Mike would feel awkward pulling her away from her guests even though she stays close to him all night, making everyone come to her.

Finally, after what seems like years, they're almost by themselves. Will gives them a knowing look and disappears to his bedroom, bidding Mike goodnight.

"Do you have to go home?" El asks as Hopper and Joyce disappear into the kitchen to start cleaning up.

"Not for another 30 minutes," Mike replies, shoving his hands into his sports jacket. "Let's go sit on the porch and talk for a little bit."

"Okay," El agrees, taking his hand and going outside with him.

She sits down in one of the old wooden rocking chairs and gestures to the one next to her.

Instead, Mike kneels down in front of her and fumbles for the cardboard box. "I have something for you."

El rolls her eyes. "Mike you need to stop spoiling me. You already gave me a gift."

Mike waves her off. "That was a practical gift. I wasn't going to give this to you in front of everyone else. Because, well, you know how they can be about. . ." he trails off and opens the box, balancing the cover on the arm of her chair.

El gasps when she sees it. "Is that another promise ring?"

Mike gestures to the costume ring. "I wanted you to have something a little more. . . grownup than that one."

El guards it protectively. "Oh Mike, I love this ring!" she insists.

"You can keep that ring too!" he assures her. "I just. . . this one is different."

"How?" El asks, furrowing her eyebrows and looking at him expectantly.

Mike works the pink ring over her knuckle and rubs the red indent its left, before handing it to her.

"Well, it costs a little more than 50 cents for starters and I didn't find it in Holly's toys, for another."

El laughs. "I guess you're right. It is really pretty… thank you," she pauses to examine it. "Hey, Mike. . . could you say it again? The promise you made me the first time you gave me a ring?"

Mike falters, for a second he considers telling her that what he has to say this time is so much better than the last time. But she's looking at him with that smile, the one where he would give her anything and everything if she asked for it.

"I promise to be your best friend and to love you. . . for as long as you'll let me," Mike says, he wants to ask her if she'll let him love her forever. But the words die on his tongue because forever still seems so big at their age. So, he leans in to kiss her instead.

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When they're 18, he gives her his class ring. It's a little big for her, so she wears it on her middle finger on her left hand instead and it sends an unintentionally clear message: El Hopper belongs to Mike Wheeler.

She, in turn, gives him her class ring. "It's a promise," she tells him as she presses it into his hand, grateful to finally give him something in return that isn't just words. "A promise to be your best friend and to love you. . . as long as you'll let me."

Even though he doesn't have to and it's probably grossly out of character and not fitting with his aesthetic, he wears her ring on a

chain around his neck, tucked in his sweater, close to his heart.

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Eventually, they graduate from high school and El moves the class ring to her jewelry box. She wears the moonstone until it breaks. She spends the day crying while Will assures her that she doesn't need stuff to actually keep promises and Max reminds her that rings are like a sign of ownership. . . and who actually needs that?

Will shoots her a dirty look and says, "You're not helping!" before sending her away.

Mike tells El that he'll be back soon and spends the rest of the afternoon scouring stores for something to replace it with. He sifts through gaudy cocktail rings with stones that are larger than her finger, until he finally finds a simple gold band with a white opal. He buys it and goes back to El's house.

By the time he gets there, she's already left for work at the diner.

Instead of making her wait, he goes to see her. She's wearing a poufy poodle skirt and there are a few families because there's an early bird special. But El looks so dejected; Mike puts those things aside and walks towards her.

Even though Mike has been on the end of this a dozen times, he still gets a little nervous that maybe she'll change her mind.

The corners of El's mouth lifts when she sees him, her eyes rimmed in red from crying so much. "Give me a second, okay? I need to put Mrs. Finster's order in."

"That's fine," Mike assures her, shifting back and forth on his feet because he's kind of impatient to really put a smile back on her face.

She returns a few seconds later and before he can overthink it or chicken out because he's very aware he has an audience, he takes the ring out of his pocket. He hopes he doesn't embarrass her too much because these moments are usually reserved just for them.

"Here. . ." he says, taking her hand and putting it on. "I didn't want

you to be upset because the other one broke. . ." he trailed off. "You know my promise is still good, whether you have a ring or not. I'm going to be your best friend. . . and love you. . ." *forever*, "as long as you let me."

El nods, not even bothering to look down at her finger. "I know. Same —"

"How many times do I have to remind you, you can't wear rings at work!?" El's boss hollers from behind the counter.

"I was just about to take it off!" El said, barely even glancing at him. "Thank you for doing this Mike. It-it really means a lot to me. . . and you know, I promise too."

Mike gives her a quick kiss and tells her that he'll come and get her after work. He's leaving when he overhears Mrs. Finster asking if she's just gotten engaged.

"I don't think so. . ." El answers, glimpsing over her shoulder at Mike. "I mean, I've never been engaged before. It's kind of a symbol that we're going to love each other and be each other's best friend for as long as the other person wants."

"Honey, it's a lot more than that. . . boys just don't go out of their way to give them rings unless they're serious about them."

El can't take her eyes off Mike now. "Oh. Do you mean he wants to marry me?"

Her boss nods and adds his two cents to the conversation. "Yeah, it's something like that."

Mike blushes and disappears as fast as he can, leaving El with the realization that maybe he hasn't been completely honest with her all these years he's been making commitments he intends to keep a lot longer than just for now and giving her pieces of jewelry to wear.

He kind of has an inkling that she feels the same way. But he doesn't stay around long enough to find out if his hypothesis is right.

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"So, forever, huh?"

Mike looks up from the book he was pretending to read. "20 is kind of young to talk about forever, don't you think?"

El closes the car door and nods. "I guess. We do still have 2 more years of college left and you want to go to med school afterward. Maybe it would feel like we were tying each other down. Except, I've never felt like you were tying me down and I don't think you ever felt like I was tying you down."

"Never!" Mike reassures fervently.

El digs the ring out of her coat and holds it out to him. "Take it and promise me that one thing you've wanted to ever since you put the first one on my finger."

"I guess, I've always wanted to say. . . someday," Mike says after pausing for a long second. "Someday. . . somebody, I'm hoping we can have forever."

"Someday," El repeats, leaning over the middle seat and kissing him, she pulls away and pats him gently on the cheek. "Someday, we will have forever."

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Someday arrives almost 2 years later because he's impatient, especially since he knows she'll say yes.

He plans a dozen different ways to propose. He goes between telling her that he'll be her best friend and love her for as long as they both shall live and saying "when you realize you want to spend the rest of your life with somebody, you want the rest of your life to start as soon as possible".

He decides to leave the first one in the past, to the children they were, making promises and to not steal lines from movies no matter how good they sounded. But when it came to speaking from his heart, he would always freeze up. The words always ended up getting stuck in his throat, even though he would always start out with having the perfect thing to say.

He knows she'll say yes. She had echoed his 'someday' and she was starting to look at wedding magazines. Starting to talk about flowers and asking him what kind of cake he would like. She prefers chocolate, but if he wants something else. . .

All he wants is for her to be happy and to spend the rest of his life with her.

The night he proposes, he can't help but feel a little anxious. He knows this will be one of the biggest moments of his life, next to stumbling on her in the woods and getting into med school. He talks too much during dinner and it's all a bunch of nonsense. She's a good sport like usual, nodding and going along with everything he says.

He keeps checking his pocket every few seconds to make sure the box is still there, breathing out in relief every time his fingers touch the velvet lid.

They go for a walk after they're done eating, stopping to get ice cream for dessert. They walk hand-in-hand, enjoying the warm summer New England evening. Somebody somewhere is playing music, and Mike suddenly thinks this will be the perfect moment to ask her.

He stops abruptly, cherry chocolate chunk drips down his hand. "El," he says.

"Yes?" she asks.

"Do you remember that night we first met?"

"How could I forget? It's not every day you meet a boy who's willing to give a strange girl their coat and take them home with them," El replies as she smiles of the memory of that stormy night all those Novembers ago.

"You changed my life so much. . ."

"You changed my life too, so much more than I could have ever imagined. . ." El answers. "I'm going to spend the rest of my life thankful our paths crossed—"

Mike chuckles. "El, I'm trying to propose here! I have a speech and everything."

Realization dawns on El's face and then, pure excitement blooms. "Oh! Oh!" she says. "Well, go on then!"

"My life changed the night I met you. You created a whole new world for me outside of the little world I was living in." he fumbles with his cone, trying hard not to drop it while he gets the ring he picked to propose with.

El takes it from him and chucks both ice creams into a trash can. "We can buy later," she tells him.

He doesn't care he gets the box out and takes out the simple diamond he picked for her. "I cannot imagine the world you showed me without you. Marry me and I will spend the rest of my life making you happy. I love you."

"I love you too. I will marry you."

He puts the ring on her left hand and they kiss with the enthusiasm of a newly engaged couple. Everything feels fresh, everything is charged with promise and excitement.

The rest of their lives.

It was pretty much the best thing he had ever heard.

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He gives her one last promise ring on their wedding day, slipped on after the *'I dos'*.

It feels a lot heavier than all the other times. A lot more solemn. It isn't as long as you'll let me anymore. It's truly forever this time.

But then, it always has been.

The End

Author's Note:

Like always, this story was brought to you because of a discussion I had with my friend, PureShores. She is subjected to many of my fan fiction ideas or head canons on Twitter and has been for the last 9 years. I hope you enjoyed it a little bit and that you'll leave a review or a kudo, if you feel like it.

The title of this story came from "Absolutely Smitten" by dodie. It was almost called "The Promise Ring" but I'm so sick of cop out titles and that's something I've done a lot in the last 15 years of my fan fiction writing career.

Until Next Time!

Love,
Holly

P.S
Fun Fact, I use "ring" 32 times and "promise" 20 times in this story. Yikes.